1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

staged and this was usually sufficient to incapacitate the offender and make him decide to move—at least for a while—into some other district. The group thus hastily convened to mete out public justice seldom numbered more than sixty or seventy people (seven or eight households) and having been convened *ad hoc* would remain camped together only for the forty-eight hours or less needed to deal with the emergency.

Joint Activities

This discussion of the alternative lines of action open to an outraged household head enables us to specify the relatively rare occasions during the year when the dull, quiet, day-by-day, food-gathering routines of the dispersed household camps were interrupted by events that required many households to gather together in one place and indulge in joint action. Foremost among these occasions were big funerals and the *kolema* ceremonial, both of which were mentioned above. These were the main religious events of the year, full of dancing, singing, wailing, and excitement. The excitement was the psychological result of so many people being together at the same time, a rare experience in the life of any Tiwi. Since the *kolema* ceremonial was an annual event and even the most enthusiastic funeral goer did not attend more than three or four really big funerals in the course of a year, we may reckon that even an old and important man, much concerned with ritual observances, would probably find himself a participant in such crowd activities on not more than some six occasions per year. For less important men and for women and children the number of such occasions was less than six. The *kolema* ceremonial lasted two weeks or more, big funerals, even when they became the occasion for carrying on other public business, did not last more than four or five days each. Hence we may reckon an average of about a week each for the half-dozen times a really big man spent in the company of a sizable crowd of fellow tribesmen, giving a total annual average of about six or seven weeks at most out of every fifty-two—or a little less than 10 percent of the year spent by an old important man in large ceremonial activities or what Durkheim calls the collective life of the tribe.

In addition there were the smaller gatherings, such as the funerals of younger men and most women, and the calling together of a number of households to settle a dispute in the manner we have described above. These were collective occasions also but they brought together a considerably smaller crowd. A really big man's funeral was likely to draw over three hundred people or even as much as one-third of the whole tribe.[4] Not only did many

[4] Tamboo's funeral in May, 1929 (he died in the previous August) drew practically the full band membership (men, women, and children) of the four Bathurst Island bands; almost all the Munupula; many Mandiimbula; and large delegations from the remaining three bands. With such a crowd, an actual head count was difficult, especially of the children, but there must have been over four hundred people present. Needless to say, excitement was intense; more fights occurred, more insults were exchanged, more ancient feuds revived and new ones started, and more food consumed than at any funeral in living memory. At least that was the opinion of Tamboo's chief mourners, but since it was they who threw the party and had to pay for it, they may have been biased.

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OI20 Tiwi OI20

Not only did many people come to such a funeral to express their kinship with, and pay their respects to, the deceased, but as mentioned above, many men with disputes to settle or fights to pick let such matters ride until the next big funeral was called and then took advantage of the large crowd to provide the necessary witnesses for the transaction of the outstanding legal business. Gatherings of many households for purely legal affairs, without funerals or *kolema* ceremonial as the main *raison d'etre* for the gathering, were comparatively rare and when they did occur they were usually called by one man, to settle one case only, and hence did not promote the attendance of very many households. Similarly, the funerals of most women and of younger and therefore less important men drew together at most ten or twelve households and a few other individuals, so that the crowd was usually not above one hundred people at the most. A single *ad hoc* legal duel, even when an episode in a long-drawn out and notorious dispute, seldom drew more than this number. Duels always attracted some spectators who came for the excitement, even though not personally involved, provided of course they were camped somewhere in the vicinity.

This second type of collective gathering, of which the smaller funerals and the single duels were the main occasions, might then require the attendance of a household head, accompanied by some or all of his household members, perhaps five or six times a year. These gatherings would each last less than forty-eight hours, and since the people the household head met at them would mostly be people of his own band or of closely adjoining bands, the excitement of seeing unfamiliar faces—people not seen for over a year perhaps—would be absent. We may reckon that attendance at these smaller, more localized gatherings, and the participation in group activity which they entailed, took up two more weeks, all told, out of the yearly round. When these two weeks are added to the six or seven already estimated for the time spent by a busy public man at the large gatherings, we find that even the busiest and most gregarious senior elders spent less than ten weeks out of the fifty-two in collective activity outside their immediate households.

To complete the list of occasions which called for joint activity by the members of several households, we must include the joint kangaroo hunt. This activity was very localized and very spasmodic, occurring only when and where conditions were right and somebody felt sufficiently energetic to organize it. Much of the Tiwi country is a mixture of dense scrub and relatively open savannah; kangaroo are relatively easy to hunt in the latter but very hard to get near in the denser types of vegetation. The native method of hunting was based on getting as close as possible to the animal before it saw or heard the hunter. If it detected the hunter, it fled, and no Tiwi in his senses ever threw a spear or a throwing stick at a moving kangaroo.[8] Only when the animal was standing still and the hunter was close enough to aim carefully at a vital part was the spear thrown. At certain seasons of the year, particularly after the end of the wet and early in the dry season, many sections of good kangaroo country gave very poor hunting returns because the grass had become

[8] The up-and-down movement of a hopping kangaroo in flight makes it an extraordinarily difficult target even for skilled white hunters armed with shotguns or rifles.

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OI20 Tiwi OI20

so high and rank that the hunters were unable to get near the kangaroo. In this event, a senior man of the district might decide to convene a grass-burning posse. To it he invited more or less whom he pleased, so long as he included other household heads of the same band and other senior men from outside it whose ancestry gave them some claim to be invited. At the appointed time the hunters assembled, perhaps ten or fifteen adult men, with younger ones doing the actual hunting and the older ones supervising. The women and children acted as beaters; the grass was set on fire over a big area, and the kangaroos rounded up and killed while dazed by the smoke and the noise. The bag of animals killed in such a concerted hunt sometimes ran higher than one kangaroo per participant, so that every man, woman, and child present was able to gorge himself on kangaroo meat for a day or two. This sudden glut of meat was not, however, the main object of the burning, but a dividend. Even though few kangaroos were caught in the smoke and confusion, the burned-over area would provide good visibility for kangaroo hunting during the rest of the dry season, since the new tender shoots that sprang from the burned-over grass were a favorite food of the kangaroo and served to lure them out of the denser scrub areas and the mangrove swamps where hunting them was always difficult.

These occasional joint hunts, like the occasional small fights and the funerals of unimportant people, usually brought together only the members of households who lived relatively close to one another, so that while they are included in the list of events which interrupted household isolation, they did not, as a rule, involve any interaction between members of any wider group than the neighboring households. Perhaps the whole matter of activity beyond the household and the band can be illustrated best by an actual case. We have already mentioned the venerable Tu'untalumi, an old man resident among the Tiklauila, who as late as 1929, and despite the fact that by then the Tiklauila were the band most subject to mission influence, nonetheless had a list of twenty-one wives. In other ways besides his record of polygamy, Tu'untalumi was a pillar of the old culture. Though past seventy and much too old to hunt, he was a most enthusiastic and indefatigable song and dance composer, and in his zest for ceremonial he made a point of attending every big festival and as many smaller ones as he could get to. The whole tribe respected Tu'untalumi as a big man, liked him as a person, admired him for his steadfast support of Tiwi traditions, and most of all accepted him as a sort of leading authority on ritual matters. When dubious or disputed points of ceremonial were submitted to him, his decision, given clearly and firmly and with much citation of precedent and the distant past, was accepted without demur. His presence at a gathering located outside his own district was always a source of gratification to the household which had convened the gathering. The fact that Tu'untalumi had seen fit to attend not only made that household feel important but also provided its members with a technical guide and arbiter for unofficial help in running the rituals. The old man loved going to parties—and he was always a welcome guest—and years of such activity had given him such a sturdy, wiry constitution that despite his near-seventy-five years he could

123 sional patch of grass, which the rushing fire had missed, there was not a living green plant below the four-foot line. Burning the country is an annual occurrence and many are the laws governing
● 221 who may burn and who may subsequently hunt in the newly cleared
224 land. Because the fires are set each year, there is no accumulation of dry tinder to feed the fire and allow it to rage uncontrollably. Only the grass and a few fallen logs catch and these will burn rapidly and fiercely, but for a very short period. Any gap in the vegetation will stop the fire and the heavy dew, falling in the evening, will also put out the flames, leaving perhaps only isolated, smouldering logs to burn through the night. Until the first shoots of new grass push
[421] their way through the charred ground, the individual hunter who set the fire has exclusive rights to the area he set alight. Of course, no one except those who belong to that country may burn without
[671] permission of the owners. As far as possible, these laws are still upheld.

123 We soon came to a branch in the path and Albert indicated that we two girls should continue straight ahead; he would stop behind. In front of us stretched the fresh-water swamp. Out of the almost inky but clear water rose the gnarled paperbark trees, their roots so intertwined they almost formed a floor, albeit a most slippery and irregular one, over the rotten vegetation in the bottom of the swamp. I picked a particularly large rooted tree for my bath
[515] tub, and a short distance away Agnes did the same. If one was careful not to disturb the fine deposit on the bottom but managed to stay on top of the slippery roots, the clear cool water was as sweet and soft as one could wish for. We stayed for about an hour, washing ourselves and our clothes, but finally an impatient call from Albert put an end to this pleasure. Albert had been hunting for a possum, but in this area so close to the camp, they had already been depleted.

123 Instead of returning to camp, Albert decided that now was as
411 good a time as any to cut his *mikngani*, the sticks with which they
322 kill the geese. After another mile or so into the bush, we came to a grove of stout bushes of a kind I had not seen before. They had
[223] long, straight branches of about a half-inch diameter. These Albert